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ABSTRACT

This book depicts the lives of women who taught school in the late 19th and early 20th centuries on the prairies and plains of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. The book is based on the narratives, letters, and diaries of 96 schoolwomen and on interviews with living pioneers, memoirs, school reports, photographs, and other documents. Part 1 includes four chapters that describe the educational, social, and physical environment during this period, as well as the geographical and historical context. These chapters detail the teachers' family backgrounds, education, living conditions in the Midwest, and teaching experiences to set the scene for interpreting the role of teaching in the lives of the women and their role within emerging rural communities. This section also includes information on teachers' salaries, the number and percentage of women teachers, and the expansion of the school-age population during this period. Part 2 includes the writings and narratives of Nancy Rebecca Higgins Gaddis, Sarah Jane Price, Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, Bessie M. Tucker Gilmer, and Ethel Hale Russel. Of these five women, two taught for only a few years until they married; one remained unmarried and was a long-term teacher and farmer; and two were well-educated and were long-term professionals, teacher educators, and community leaders. These narratives reflect the profound changes in American public education during the period. The schoolwomen of the prairies and plains carried out their profession during the transitions from frontier to established communities, from pioneer teacher to professional educator, and from crude one-room schools to multigraded consolidated schools. These personal narratives reveal the women's motivations and aspirations, not only as teachers, but also in their personal lives. Contains over 200 references, notes, photographs, and an index. (LP)

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